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For further information:
Karen Lightfoot at 202-225-5051

NEW GAO REPORT FINDS SERIOUS DEFICIENCIES IN EPA'S PROCEDURES TO PREVENT CONFLICTS OF INTEREST ON ADVISORY BOARDS

A new GAO report released today by Rep. Henry A. Waxman found serious deficiencies in EPA's procedures to prevent conflicts of interest and ensure balance on the Agency's Science Advisory Boards. GAO found that as a result of these shortcomings, the Boards frequently contain numerous individuals with ties to affected industries or with other potential conflicts of interest. Science Advisory Boards review agency scientific decisions and have broad influence on EPA clean air, clean water, and toxics regulations.

"This is another example of how special interests are subverting public health and sound science," said Rep. Waxman. "The American people expect decisions that affect environmental and public health regulations to be based on unbiased science, but this GAO study reveals polluting industries are in the position to influence panel findings. Behind the scenes, polluting industries are constantly working to weaken public health and environmental standards."

To be effective, the Science Advisory Boards must be free of any conflict of interest and uncompromised by bias. But the GAO found that EPA:

- fails to provide for adequate determinations of conflict of interest,
- fails to obtain sufficient information to evaluate conflicts of interest,
- fails to obtain appropriate information on financial disclosure forms,
- fails to review disclosure forms in a timely fashion, and
- fails to adequately disclose potential conflicts of interest to the public.

One of the panels examined by GAO addressed the risk from 1,3-butadiene, a cancer-causing chemical used in the manufacture of synthetic rubber, nylon, and paint, and emitted by chemical plants and automobiles. On this panel, six of the thirteen panelists represented the industry position. Four had worked for chemical companies or industry-affiliated research organizations, including one member who worked for the company that manufactured 1,3-butadiene and another who led an industry-funded study of the chemical. The Science Advisory Board recommended weakening standards protecting the public from exposure to 1,3-butadiene. The 1,3-butadiene decision is currently under EPA review.

In response to the GAO findings, Rep. Waxman today called on Administrator Whitman to halt the assessment of 1,3-butadiene. "Before continuing with the assessment, EPA must take concrete actions to fix the problems identified in this report," said Rep. Waxman. "Public health could be undermined if the conflicts of interest identified in GAO's report are not addressed."